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Site specificity in contemporary large-scale harbour transformation projects

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Abstract

Harbour areas all over the Western world are being left idle due to global structural changes, and we observe that all too often the question of their reintegration into the urban fabric is addressed with the same standard development answers. More often than not, these vast areas are cleared to leave room for new economy-driven or branding-steered projects based on offices, housing, shopping and other object-centred programmes, resulting from time to time in saving a crane or two from demolition, which we think is not enough to justify calling a project site-specific. Our interest is thus to develop a wider understanding of site specificity for these large-scale areas and their long history of evolution from pre-industrial through industrial to post-industrial states. We propose a heuristic-driven framework for scrutinising site specificity, and showcase it in two contemporary European multi-disciplinary, long-term urban development projects on former harbour sites, each selected to represent a set of outstanding site-specific aspects.

harbour areas / large-scale / port cities / site specificity / transformation

Port cities have been particularly vulnerable to the effects of globalisation, shifting technologies and distribution logics – the third wave of industrialisation. These drivers among others have created and will continue to create huge areas of port wastelands, with a public interest to develop and integrate them into the contemporary metropolises. If centrally located, the integration and transformation of these vast areas is often pushed by immense political interest due to their symbolic value—they serve as generators of city branding (Petrov 2011). This global challenge could be met with a globally applicable solution of a complete make-over of previously cleared port grounds, and there have been many such harbour developments over the last quarter century, with the London Docklands as one of the earliest and most prominent examples in Europe, first analysed from an urban planning point of view by Han Meyer (1999). Indeed, harbour transformation has been internationally addressed in urbanism and urban studies on professional and academic levels since the 1990s (cf. Prelorenzo et al. 1997), mostly evolving from the general critique of modernistic economy-driven tabula rasa developments, along with gentrification and other social issues. More recently, the interaction of global economies and local properties in port cities has been in the focus of urban planning (Bruttomesso & Alemany 2011; Hein 2011). Since harbour areas are not usually an integral part of the city administration, professional associations created in the 1990s have set up a dialogue between municipalities and port authorities in order to coordinate harbour development in line with urban planning issues. [1] The urban reconquest of these particular post-industrial areas, and especially the urban design of waterfronts, has since been discussed in the fields of architecture and landscape architecture. [2] However, site specificity has not yet been explicitly addressed within this debate.

Today there is an interest in elaborating new answers to these issues, derived from the premise that reuse and transformation of derelict port and port-related areas offers some advantages over a total redesign; reuse counteracts homogenisation, it supports a cultural climate that values the multi-layered, heterogeneous and complex, and it has resource-saving effects regarding ecology and (partially) economy.

The city-port relationship is determined by various rationales concerning both localisation and development of port and city respectively, with the result that these two entities prove to be radically different, both in administrative and physical ways (Meyer 1999; Schubert 2011). We prefer

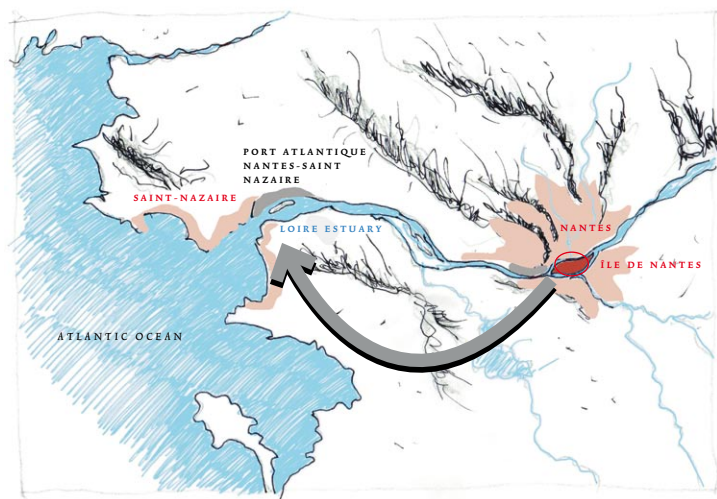


Figure 1 Some 60 km inland from the Atlantic coast, where the meandering river Loire had shaped a number of islands in its flood plains, a settlement was installed on the northern banks of the river, the origin of Nantes. Over the centuries it developed into a wealthy port city. Several islands of the meandering river were merged by landfill to form the Île de Nantes, the first to host residential districts of the extending city, later for port activities and naval industries. With the creation of a new port in St Nazaire in 19th century, closer to the sea and not threatened by the silting of river Loire, Ile de Nantes's industries fell into decay and have recently started to accommodate spontaneous uses, from trivial car parks and storage to artistic events and workshops, complementing the still-active commercial and residential districts of the area,

330 hectares in total. A long-term urban renovation enterprise was initiated by the public developer Samoa, under the guidance of urban planner Laurent Théry, through a competition held in 1999, won by architects/landscape architects Alexandre Chemetoff and Jean-Louis Berthomieu. Instead of a classical masterplan, the designers proposed an evolutive planning document, the 'plan-guide', and the corresponding survey, mapping, monitoring and intervention methods which they had the opportunity to carry out during a 10-year contract from 2000 to 2010. In 2010, Samoa appointed a new head, Jean-Luc Charles, and a competition brought about a new team of designers around urban planner Marcel Smets - uapS (Samoa 2007/2010, Gravelaine 2009/2010).



Figure 2 Île de Nantes: 'plan-guide', site survey 2003 (top), 'plan-guide', project 2008

ALEXANDRE CHEMETOFF / ATELIER DE L'ÎLE DE NANTES



ARNAULD DUBOYS-FRESNEY



VINCENT JACQUES / SAMOA

Figures 3&4 Île de Nantes: Quai des Antilles before and after transformation

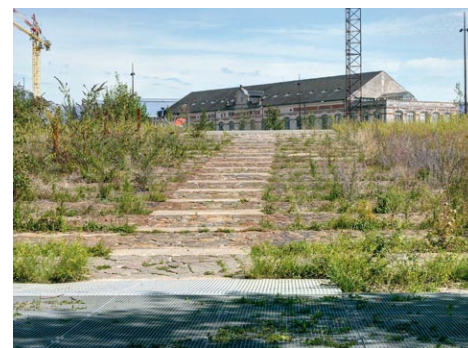
to regard the urban reconquest of the harbour areas from the perspective of sustaining this 'otherness' while at the same time legitimating their integration. How to develop these vast heavily built-up areas while still sustaining their peculiarities? And how to approach the idea of site specificity on these synthetic, formerly production-oriented areas when the available tools for assessing their legacy derive from various disciplines and the purpose may be defined by the future use or particular agendas (e.g., cultural heritage)? We prefer an overarching approach also capable of incorporating natural spatial conditions, nature processes and other performative aspects in addition to the ones proposed by architecture (focusing on buildings and urban environments), urban studies (zooming in on societal issues) and environmental studies (aiming at measuring environmental factors). [3] As for the discipline of heritage studies, we recognise that site specificity has not been explicitly included in debate and theory production at the international level, even if preservation issues related to historic port architecture and waterfronts have become a subject within the (wide) field of industrial heritage, as covered by The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH).

Site

The notion of site has been (re)gaining increased interest within the design disciplines through the last decade (Hvattum 2010) and is starting to become a subject in design theory. We find it worth drawing attention to the theorising about site and site specificity within planning, urban design, landscape architecture, architecture and the arts, as it reveals both changes and strong, persistent positions. Today we can recognise an oscillation between a number of opposing but still widely accepted theoretical positions, and we propose to overcome them while positioning ourselves in a new strand of thinking.

A genealogy of site understandings

Modernism in architecture, with its conception of site as a tabula rasa to be modified into a terrain idéal (Le Corbusier) on which the universal design can unfold, attracted severe criticism of its 'international style' after World War II because of its lack of respect for regional particularities and practices. The post-war critique of modern architecture and urbanism attempted to reintroduce and value local identity and human environments through notions such as genius loci (Norberg-Schulz 1979), place identity, context, (critical) regionalism (Frampton 1983) and other terms. This position is based on an essentialist 'return to things', employing a



ELLEN BRAAE / LISA DIEDRICH

Figures 5 a-f Île de Nantes, on site, 2010

phenomenological approach that raises knowledge through direct experience and immersion in a place. In this extreme form, place gained an absolute value in the late twentieth century as something to be revealed by the skilled expert.

Concomitantly we find another position that also moved away from the abstract, place-unbound ideals of modernism towards a revaluation of local specificities as personified by Ian McHarg and his deconstruction of nature's components into a layered system described in *Design with Nature* (1969). However, McHarg appropriated modernist architecture's claim to base architecture on proper science, and in so doing paved the way for integrating ecological knowledge as the basis on which to plan the centrifugally expanding city. In both cases, local values are in focus. More recently, we also find the reverse position with Rem Koolhaas who, in his seminal article 'The Generic City', dismisses the claim for identity as a senseless straitjacket and instead promotes the notion of the generic city, that is, the city without properties (1995). It contains what anthropologist Marc Augé calls 'non-places' and considers them as constituting elements of supermodernity (1992). These concepts are, however, still part of the rhetoric and critique of architecture.

Today we recognise a new position, still having the local in focus but avoiding the essentialist, scientific and, partly, relativistic traps. It is an understanding based on pragmatism and how things work, acknowledging the presence and the inherent 'nature' of something 'out there'. We want to pursue the question of how to address this locale and everything that exists in it in a prescriptive perspective. This framework identifies site as a dynamic relational construct, and site specificity as relational specificity.

Site as a dynamic relational construct in the design disciplines

Introducing this understanding into the design disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture, urban design and urban planning, U. S. researchers Carol Burns and Andrea Kahn define site as a dynamic relational construct: Designers 'construe and construct' site from an exchange between what they see in front of them and what they wish to have there, between ideas from outside (the physical site) and inside (disciplinary norms, personal convictions, societal ideals), between the real as observed and the real as defined (Burns & Kahn 2005: xv). In order to shape the vocabulary as a base for our analysis and discussion, we follow Burns and Kahn's definition of what constitutes a site in design. If, in popular language, a site is the ground on which something takes place, a site in a design context is first of all the area a designer receives from a client, to develop and shape. In this respect it is given and has clear boundaries. However, on starting to explore this site the designer's interest generally shifts to features that connect the delimited area of intervention with larger systems, and the designer's creative act often introduces elements that have an influence beyond the site itself. Kahn and Burns therefore speak of three distinct areas of site. The first, the most obvious one, is the area of control—it corresponds to the site within its property lines. The second is called the area of influence—it comprises systems and forces that act upon the given site even if they do not take place within its boundaries. The third is the area of effect—defining the domains beyond the given site that are impacted by design. Furthermore, Burns and Kahn distinguish between 'site thinking'—general and proper to every discipline or designer—and 'thinking about a site', the specific plot of land with its various conditions. As they argue, '[...] a specific locale provides the material ground for action in design practice, and the designers' ideas about site provide a theoretic-

cal background against which design actions are taken' (Burns & Kahn 2005: viii). Relying on this approach, our hypothesis is that we can learn about the designers' general site thinking and hence get information on site specificity through the analysis of their particular 'thinking about a site', that is, through the assessment of current design projects. Furthermore we also build our analysis on the hypothesis that we can learn about the designers' 'reading' through their 'writing', or 'editing', as we shall see.

Design as site interpretation in landscape architecture

Transporting this understanding of site into landscape architecture, U. S. scholar Elizabeth Meyer (2005) examines the site thinking of American landscape architects of the pre-modern and post-modern eras. She notices 'site reading and editing strategies' that confirm how far these landscape architects are from seeing sites as empty canvases. They rather perceive them as existing situations rich in all kind of material and non-material, that is, 'full of spaces, nature and history, whose latent forms and meanings can be made apparent and palpable, through design' (Meyer 2005: 102). Meyer also observes that the personal immersion of the designers into site is crucial to their thinking about the site as a strong conceptual beginning for their design response. With Meyer, we point out that this partly rational, partly affective site approach questions the division, inherited from modernism, between a scientific site analysis and a conceptual design act, as the designers tend to synthesise these intellectual movements into one creative act: 'design as site interpretation, and site as program, not surface for program' (Meyer 2005: 93). However, this still leaves us with the question of how to reflect the phenomenological or bodily on-site experience in this kind of site thinking, and the two intellectual movements – the reading and the editing – are related.

Site specificity as instances of site-bound knowledge and experience in the arts

The term 'site specificity' was first coined in the arts in the 1960s and '70s, evolving from a phenomenological-experiential understanding (site as an agglomeration of physical attributes). U. S. art historian Miwon Kwon (2002) explains how over the following decennia the idea of site became detached from the concept of site specificity and how, furthermore, the understanding shifted into a social-institutional one (site as network-related spaces and crossings) then into a discursive one (site as public realm, as a theoretical concept), later struggled with redefining the role of site in a nomadic and market-driven art practice, and eventually led to a confusion about authorship in a community-oriented perspective. Finally, the vague but persistent aspect of all artistic site-specific approaches is the idea of singular, unrepeatable instances of site-bound knowledge and experience. Therefore Kwon invites a redefinition of site specificity while conjoining seemingly opposed ideas: the nostalgic desire for a retrieval of rooted, place-bound identities, and the anti-nostalgic embrace of a nomadic fluidity of subjectivity, identity and spatiality. Bridging the gap in this way means relying on a pragmatic, constructivist idea of site being construed, and constructed by the artist from relational sensibility, and pursuing the double aim set forth by Kwon of countering the fluid and the static.

Design versus transformation

Transformation in a design perspective is a situation where something is changed from one state to another – relating that former 'something' to the new 'something else' while knowing that neither before nor after is static. The art of transformation is basically hermeneutic and closely linked to the existent, and hence indirectly involves theories of preservation in these discussions as well as the question about the relationships between past, present and future. However, the theory of transformation is amazingly sparse in spite of the fact that the main part of future architectural work will have to deal with transformation of existing built stock (Arrhenius 2011: 88). Landscape architects have a long tradition of interpreting landscape, but the industrially influenced and constructed sites and their call for design as intervention challenge the conceptual framework of both landscape and urbanism (Braae 2012). The strong interest in what is already there leads us back to the notion of site specificity and the possibility of grasping all aspects that might be associated with the existent.

Even though the above definition of transformation may seem well known, it differs fundamentally from the methodological basis on which architecture – historically constitutive for landscape architecture and urban planning practices – has been grounded since the Renaissance, and hence from traditional design practice as it was understood throughout most of the twentieth century. Following this line of thought, the dominant conception of architecture, and, hence, of design, is connected with creating new forms; it is an assemblage of ideas, desires and activities that constitute a complex that serves as a driving core of Western culture and what we have come to know as 'progress'. Design is an act taking place in a remote media in terms of character, scale and geography, and it is handled by means closely linked to the development of the perspective as a visual and graphical way of perceiving and representing the world (Bek 2010). These diagrams – plan, section and perspective – are on the one hand providing us with a privileged viewing angle, and, on the other hand, constituting a matrix for thinking about and producing architecture; they entail a certain working method. Creation in terms of design implies a clear start – constructing a representation of the project in mind on a blank sheet of paper. The project hence fully reflects the intentions of the author in terms of originality and ideally making up an entity of its own right: an oeuvre.

Transformation, conversely, takes the existent as its point of departure and oscillates between finding out what is there and testing what it could become, considering the reading and the writing to be two reflexive and mutually constituting processes. This double reflex can be understood as creative engagement in the site through open processes by means of intervention. These interventions can be designed as additions, subtractions, superimpositions, détournements etc., and their presence and impact can vary from hardly anything to an almost complete make-over (Braae 2012). While the traditional design act is associated with originality in terms of 'the new', novelty in transformation is rather associated with the ability to create a dialogue with the existent, depending on site-related knowledge: developing 'new views' on uses, aesthetics etc., ideally focused on enhancing relations between the nostalgic/place-bound and the un-nostalgic/nomadic, between the material and the immaterial, and between the present (including the past) and the future. This influences the de-

sign process in terms of integrating and balancing the reality found on site aesthetically, in the basic broad understanding of the notion of aesthetics ('aisthesis', Böhme 2006), an approach opposed to the traditional privileged, mediated and hence also distanced overview as previously described. This on-site approach has also been termed 'as found' and situates the creative act on the threshold between perception ('aisthesis') and production ('poiesis') (Lichtenstein 2001). Within transformation the existent becomes the main driver, and design thus becomes a hermeneutic agency privileging a conception of novelty in the sense that it focuses on creating new perceptions of the existing rather than an *ex nihilo* creation of new objects.

Transformation does not necessarily imply that the future is subordinate to the present. The result is the sum of the dialogue between the existent and the intervention without a predetermined relationship. Furthermore the outcome is not complete or concluded. It is *a priori* open for further design intervention due to its heterogeneous and compound character that relies on a paradigm of complexity rather than on one of harmony. The request for interaction also includes the users, as formulated by Thomas Sieverts (Seggem 2008: 257), pointing towards the ethically driven aspiration to create awareness of the environment.

One of the main challenges posed by the transformation of industrial areas is to extract these areas from their original realm of production and to find a way to legitimise their presence as part of the urban sphere. This intention influences both the programme of these sites and their reconnection with the city. On a general level, the traditional relationships between site and programme as defined in urban design are *per se* challenged as our desideratum aims at developing the programme from the site rather than superimposing a programme, developed in another context, onto the site (Marot 2003). Since harbour areas constitute a category of their own, often situated as a nexus between the urban core and the water, their future use is also defined by their ability to link the urban core to the water and to provide a densely built-up district with extensive open public spaces.

Framework of analysis

So how can we address the site specificity aspect in large-scale harbour transformation projects? In the following we set up a heuristically driven framework of analysis that is able to reflect the crucial related understandings; we are looking at site transformation from a design-oriented, overarching perspective seeking to bridge the gap between an object-related approach (involving the search for the 'original' and the traces) with a subject-related mode (covering bodily experience and memory related to place). These two positions can be said to correspond to constructivism and phenomenology respectively, and they are traditionally regarded as contrasting philosophical and theoretical positions. We suggest bridging the gap between these positions in order to help us reflect on the ways that sites can be perceived and constructed through interventions based on site readings. This is in line with a pragmatic point of view which assumes that effects are ways of understanding and thinking, 'often indirect and non-reflective but thinking all the same' (Thrift 2004: 60). Furthermore, and in line with Kwon, we are seeking to develop a framework

of analysis that can embrace both the fluid and the static. We are looking for a framework that is sensitive to singular, unrepeatable instances of site-bound knowledge and experience that can structure our understanding of site specificity.

Site specificity / site thinking / site reading

Preservation theory traditionally operates with a distinction between material and immaterial heritage. We extend this focus by introducing a flux parameter in order to direct our attention towards the site's dynamic aspects. This provides us with three main categories: the physical, the flux and the immaterial.

The physical aspects embrace partly structures (ranging from syntax to open space and infrastructure), partly materials (ranging from mere building material to large objects and built-up ensembles). The physical structures can be identified via a formal comparative analysis of the existing situation and the proposed project (through diagrams). Materials and their reuse can be partly detected in the same way, partly—probably mainly—by on-site observation. In categorising and looking into the physical aspects in this way we support the double perspective—diagram versus on-site—that also becomes manifest in the working methods chosen by designers to support their transformative enterprise. This model allows us to capture the spatial properties of the harbour areas better as obvious site specificity agents than the commonly used linguistic model distinguishing between elements and syntax.

As for the flux parameters, we refer partly to natural processes, partly to practices, that is, people's usage of site. The understanding of natural processes as an objective, site-specific aspect includes natural cycles in both a 'hard core', natural science McHargian sense as well as the valuation of the aesthetics of succession and decay in a Ruskinian sense. In order to identify these aspects, both formal and on-site analyses have to be carried out.

The last set of parameters, the immaterial, includes memory and atmosphere. Memory is a complex and contested notion but one often referred to by designers in transformation projects. We distinguish between memory as a personal related experience and history as a collective, authoritative and therefore also intentionally composed version (Assmann 2007). This part is hard to identify, since the whole transformation approach *per se* can be based in memory. In this context we choose to rely on written sources from and interviews with the projects' authors. We recognise atmosphere as a central point of reference, as a temporal phenomenon produced between the subject and the object, between the visitor and the site, and by them, that is, the light, the weather, the structures etc. (Böhme 2006). Such aspirations can be reflected in graphical representations of the transformation project.

In total, three pairs of parameters—physical (structure, material), flux (processes, practices), and immaterial (memory, atmosphere)—are hence defined for examining site specificity and for revealing the designers' general site thinking, that is, how they construe their sites—the 'reading'.

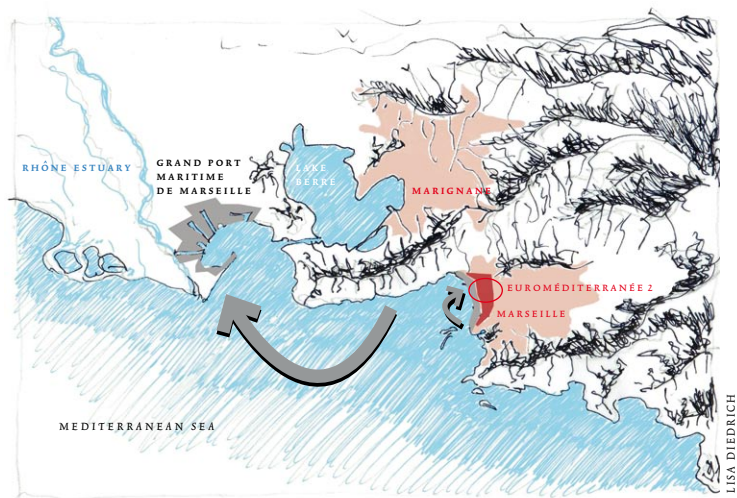


Figure 6 A natural harbour gave rise to the city of Marseille in ancient times. It is situated within the hilly, amphitheatre-like terrain of the bay of Marseille, surrounded by mountainous ridges, from which various rivulets run down to the coast. The city developed around this harbour, which in industrial times was dislocated and grew along the coast north of the old harbour to the foot of the northern mountains. With containerisation, the harbour moved again, this time occupying flat expanses of land in the nearby Rhone Delta at Etang de Berre, where a major petrochemical hub was built in the 1960s. Behind the urban port, port-related industries and working class settlements grew up, incorporating old villages and pastures. Even if the urban port remained active, these industries fell into decay, taking the whole city into a phase of economic decline. In the late 1990s the French state initiated a large-scale urban transformation project, Euroméditerranée, to revitalise the port city, run by the state-owned developer EPAEM.

The first phase, Euroméditerranée 1, has been under construction since 2000, including classical urban renovation and bold restructuring of the run-down areas behind the urban port just north of the city centre. Euroméditerranée 2 addresses the terrain to the north of this first renovation area, comprising 169 hectares. This second parcel of land extends from the coast and its urban port over a ridge with run-down industrial fabric into the valley of an old watercourse, the Aigalades river, occupied by a derelict railyard, and up again into a district with a run-down residential urban pattern. A competition was held in 2009 and generated as a first prize the design-based urban development proposal of architect Francois Leclercq with landscape architects Agence Ter, architects Rémy Marciano, Jacques Sbriglio and SETEC (EPAEM 2010/ 2011).

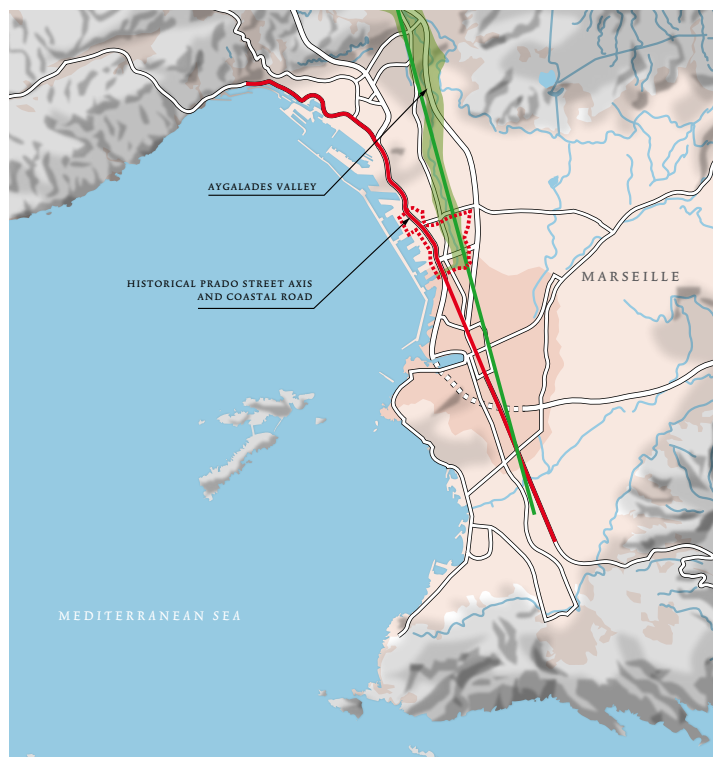


Figure 7 Euroméditerranée 2: analytical sketch

Transformation/thinking about a site/editing

Since we aim at finding strategies to identify various forms of site specificity and not at setting up norms for transformation as such, we focus on two parameters out of a wide range of 'sense of the making' aspects, namely those in which the challenge of transforming the formerly industrially defined site is exposed most significantly, and which therefore best reveal the designers' particular thinking about the site, that is, how they construct their sites—the 'editing'.

The first parameter is connectivity, chosen due to the fact that harbour areas have been separated from the city, physically, administratively and in terms of use, and furthermore have hitherto separated the city from the waterfront but are now going to be an integral part of the city while still maintaining their 'otherness'. Ways of connecting can be detected through a context analysis, scrutinising how the project enhances relations across scales internally and externally, spatially and functionally.

The second parameter is appropriation, focusing on the existing and future users' interaction with the area undergoing transformation. This addresses the designers' ability—by means of intervention—to create a platform for people's future dialogue with the existent. The importance of the designers' ability to engage a larger community is also stressed by the fact that the transformation process is often a long-term and open-ended work process. This parameter can be revealed through a process analysis, looking into the project's set-up and management and observing how it is actually appropriated by various users during and after the transformation process.



Figure 8 Euroméditerranée 2: looking southwards

From these aspects we will question the selected cases from an as-found perspective. This list can be enlarged or modified and likewise be expanded by unravelling the context of the analyses in terms of time and culture, which we shall not do here since we consider the areas of interest—contemporary European large-scale harbour transformation projects—as given and part of a common temporal and cultural realm.

Cases

In the context of a large variety of European harbour transformation projects, we are focusing on those involving large-scale urban sites (spatially more complex than a mere waterfront), long-term urban planning (with larger time frames than a single building or open space project), and multi-disciplinary teams taking a design approach to site. First investigations show that these projects differ in addressing site specificity in various ways, prognosticating to find a range of site-specific harbour transformation approaches on further study. In this paper we want to concentrate on two cases, to zoom in on two particularly differentiated approaches to site specificity, namely, the Euroméditerranée 2 project in Marseille, the winning entry of a 2009 competition, which is now moving into the de-

tailed planning process, and the Île de Nantes project in Nantes, under construction since 2001 after a competition held in 1999. In the following two analyses we will synthesise some insights about site specificity and then look into the ways their designers ‘read’ their sites—saying ‘YES’ to the existent—and how they ‘edit’ them—adding an ‘IF’ to propose transformative action. The YES-IF structure is summarised in the table below (Table 1), adopting the parameters defined above and serving as a frame for reporting from our analytical-interpretative case studies.

YES / site reading	IF / site editing
Structures	Connectivity
Materials	Appropriation
Processes	
Practices	
Memories	
Atmospheres	

Table 1 YES-IF framework of analysis



Figure 9 Euroméditerranée 2: the floodable Aygalades Park



Figure 10 Euroméditerranée 2: port promenade



Figure 11 Emile Loubon, *Vue de Marseille, prise des Aygalades un jour de marché* (1853), Marseille, Musée des Beaux-Arts

Marseille, Euroméditerranée 2

Site specificity in this case is driven by a comparison of on-site observations and findings from cartographic and historical studies with the objective of detecting latent structures, invisible on site but retrievable from these diagrammatic sources. These mediated structures evolve as the main building blocks for the designers' vision of a transformed site in which structural deficiencies are repaired and experiential qualities reinstalled. This vision is translated into a general perspective of the site, illustrating a static moment towards which the transformation process is meant to conduct us. Even if this spatial vision leaves the question of how the different spaces will look in the future quite open, it nevertheless presents a finite image after transformation, sketched from a distant, privileged position. It does not matter what the Aygalades valley looks like today as long as cartographic documents provide evidence of its latent structure as a water catchment area from whence the vision of a floodable park can arise. Diagram investigation is the warrant for site specificity. (Figs. 6-11)

YES

The competition drawings show clearly that the designers read their site as composed of two structures that can only be understood if one looks far beyond the boundaries of the competition area and into contemporary and historical diagrammatic sources. The first is the topography of the Aygalades river catchment area, the second the urban structure. Both are identified as latent structures in the competition area: not visible, hidden, abandoned or repressed on site; the river has disappeared into a discharge pipe below a disused railway yard, but the Aygalades valley landform testifies clearly to its hydrologic nature. The urban composition, mainly nineteenth century, is based on a long street axis running north-south across the southern districts, parallel and at a certain distance from the coast, connecting the southern part of town with the historical centre and the edge of the industrial port, while further north along the port it is abandoned, replaced by the intertwining threads of a coastal motorway, port feeder roads and minor district roads. The designers identify the urban fabric of the area as completely heterogeneous, a statement that can be easily verified by on-site observation, but they also claim that this fabric is held together by a (partly distorted and frequently interrupted) structure of district roads running at right angles to the coastline, a proposition that evolves from the analysis of cartographic sources.

Materials taken into account on the one hand are mineral, all part of built stock of the old industrial district and the village-like settlements and easy to observe on site, and on the other hand vegetal, consisting of the sparse Mediterranean flora of the district's streets and squares as they present themselves these days, and the ripisylvian flora that according to the designers must have once existed in the Aygalades valley, an assertion that stems from the study of historical maps, photos, paintings and other records.

Present processes are considered important due to the on-site observation that the catchment of the former Aygalades River keeps collecting storm-water and seasonally inundates the district – a dysfunction.

Practices are recognised as unrelated, even conflicting: the big infrastructural thread along the coast channels regional traffic while the dis-

tricts host pockets of everyday life, as can be observed today from visits. The designers assert that collective memory plays an important role as the stories and paintings of the Marseille countryside of pre-industrial times are still present in contemporary publications and discourses and commemorate the spatial practices of this area: the pastures were used by shepherds and the Aygalades valley by leisure seekers on their way to the freshness of the mountains.

As the competition documents show, the designers address two atmospheres, one found on site, namely of the Mediterranean port city with its multicultural community in heterogeneous streetscapes, views of the port and exposure to the wind and the sun, the other one found in historical sources, namely of the pastoral Provençal landscape in the cool river valley, with intimate places sheltered from wind and sun, of an introverted universe of Mediterranean plants.

IF

Connectivity is the main driver for transformation in this project. The designers propose editing the site where they have noticed repressed structures and processes that disconnect it from its spatial and functional context. They propose two main interventions, using materials from the site. In order to revitalise the water system and processes of the Aygalades River and connect it with its catchment area they sketch out a seasonably floodable park, to be created by removing the derelict railyard and carrying out major earthworks that will adapt the topography to the hydraulic functions, protect the district from occasional inundations and reinstall the leisure uses of the valley as translated from old paintings. Secondly, the designers propose connecting the urban fabric of the city to their site by prolonging the historical street axis northwards in the form of a seaside promenade that presents itself as an urban balcony with views over the active port and the sea, situated on top of the coastal motorway that they recommend covering and incorporating into the flank of the terrain, remodelled by reusing earth excavated from the Aygalades valley. Both measures promise high connective performance as they offer major public spaces to the inhabitants of adjacent districts while also attracting citizens from the whole metropolitan area, just as other promenades and public spaces in town do.

These open urban spaces provide the main tools for appropriation by future users, on a district level and on the further-reaching level of the Marseille-Provence metropolis: in creating the seaside promenade and the floodable river park the designers install the connecting pieces of an urban ladder structure. In proposing to start construction work on these two bold interventions during Marseille's year as European Cultural Capital in 2013 the designers want to exploit the appropriative momentum of this popular event. Complementarily, they suggest upgrading the adjacent districts over time, according to local disposition and with fine-grained interventions, always bearing in mind the aim of enhancing the parallel street pattern that opens up views to the sea. Their competition documents do not provide a more precise road map or method for this locally driven appropriation process but, rather, propose it in negotiation with local authorities.

Nantes, Île de Nantes

Site specificity in this case is predominantly driven by a close on-site observation of what exists—followed by the imagination of what it could become—a strictly dynamic ‘as found’ approach as described above. The objective is to detect and work with the site’s immediate and possible qualities. Immediate perception is the main driver for a monitoring method that is capable of steering the transformation process: open-ended, infinite and lacking a defined end scenario towards which the transformation should be conducted. The designers do not put forward any other visions than revaluing, to the largest possible extent, the ever-evolving fluid nature of the site, considered as the main feature to cultivate the differences and adapt to whatever developments and desires might arise in the course of time, a vision that rejects any predefined spatial image. The designers’ drawings act as a mirroring tool rather than a design or projection tool, allowing for continuous on-site observation, aesthetisation and evaluation, as they report site qualities in regular intervals from an immersive, everyday perspective. Unlike the Marseille case, it does not matter here what the site will look like in the future as long as its development is driven by close site monitoring. On-site exploration is the warrant for site specificity. (Figs. 1–5)

YES

In the Nantes case, one understands from the competition drawings and on-site observations that the designers read the site’s main structure as a post-industrial urban island, confined by its artificial riverbanks, provided with some bridges, crossed by main traffic arteries. There is no way of imagining the old islands of the meandering river, which could have easily been detected from historical cartography (as the catchment was in the Marseille case).

The whole island is seen as the on-site material to work with: a heterogeneous conglomerate of a multitude of fragments of various origins, accepted as such by the designers regardless of when and why and for what purpose they were installed but valued for their aesthetic, material, functional and structural qualities. They range from slipways, cranes, warehouses, hangars, working-class districts of the old wharfs and naval industries to more recent commercial and residential buildings, down to all types of existing vegetation and a whole palette of materials like pavement, asphalt, rails and railings, street furniture, and simply stone, metal, rubble and earth.

Processes as they can be observed today are entering the designers’ project: the tidal waters of the river moving pontoons up and down and filling slipways as well as processes of decay and succession.

Practices encompass those of earlier date, still present on site and recorded in contemporary maps, like dwellings, offices, shopping centres, wholesalers, but also recently installed and often spontaneous uses that are only detectable from site exploration like car parks, cafés, workshops, artists’ studios, events, the most prominent being the Machines de l’Île street art association’s parades with their walking gigantic elephant.

Memories are not read as collective memory, even if various sources prove that the Île de Nantes has this (just as in the Marseille Aigalades case), but here the designers address affective and personal memories that seem related to the smallest object found on site, worth preserving for some com-

memorative reason that can almost only be guessed. The drawings do not tell anything about memories; only a look at photos before transformation and at a site after completion bears witness to their role in the project.

Atmospheres are addressed in the same way; there are no traces in the drawings but a comparison of before (photos) and after (site visit) makes it clear that everything found on site has been accepted in its atmospheric qualities, be it the openness of a large asphalt void, the expansiveness of the view on the westernmost quays, the roughness of the mounted banks or the enclosure of a slipway.

IF

Transformation is needed to connect the single fragments of the post-industrial island, both with each other and with their urban context, in order to create a spatial, functional and sensuous continuum out of the formerly segmented and closed-off port and industrial areas. If the single object is far less important for the designers than the relationships of all kinds of components, then the proposed transformation involves detailed work on connections, a pointillism of transformative action on new relationships where needed. The designers take action only if it enhances relationships. As multifaceted as the conglomerate found on site, their interventions can involve additions like entire new buildings or new functions completing spaces or programmes such as the new architecture school, subtractions like cutting through built-up volumes in order to insert a street and give access, consolidating temporary installations to create threads of experiences such as the cafés and studios at Quai des Antilles, intentional neglect of, for instance, areas of pioneer vegetation or entire plots that might be transformed and linked at a later stage, enhancement of sensual connections to the larger geographical systems of the site like the Buren art project of which the rings installed on the westernmost quay frame views of the broad horizon of downstream Loire, where every second summer other art projects line up towards St Nazaire and demarcate in situ the terrain of which the politically promoted metropolis of the Loire estuary might one day be made. Very often, the designers’ interventions concern public space. The whole set of transformative action forms a continuous ‘stitching together’.

Appropriation stands centrally in this ‘stitching’ enterprise. It is very clear that the project drawings rely on a meticulous survey of the site as found—every single square centimetre, every transient activity seems to have been reported, valued, and fed into planning documents that differ from common project drawings, allowing for continuous interaction and adaptation to an evolving status quo. Therefore they contain a high potential for appropriation. The designers call them a ‘plan guide’. It consists of a sequence of drawings: first a meticulous site survey, mapping the existent, then a proposal on where to intervene. Only after completion of the intervention and close monitoring of the effects of appropriation by the community does the next drawing propose the next set of interventions, of which the result is again reported, evaluated, and so on. With this sequential, reflexive and relational method the designers are able to address the site as a continuously transforming environment, conceived by many more actors than the designers themselves, its stages of change monitored regularly in order to define the next set of acupunctural interventions based on the results of the previous ones.

Discussion

In order to widen our understanding of site specificity within large-scale harbour transformation projects we have developed a set of 'filters' with the intention of unravelling aspects that possibly link together the 'before' and the 'after' of the transformation process. These filters are formulated from the lowest common denominator perspective and are regarded as equal in terms of providing a fine-grained assessment grid on the one hand and room for interpretation on the other. Our analysis of two selected large-scale harbour transformation projects apparently benefits from this approach since we can disclose site specificity through all the parameters of our analytical framework, while pointing out different crucial issues. Furthermore, the use of this framework has provided us with additional knowledge. In the following we will sum up and reflect on what we have learnt from developing and using this heuristic model for identifying site specificity. We will then ponder on Kwon's request for a double reflex notion of site specificity and relate it to our projects to offer some indicators on how the designers link reading and editing and how their site thinking, reflected in their working methods, varies and affects their outcome.

Evaluating the heuristic framework

While analysing our projects under a transformation perspective we have been shifting away from the common architectural/landscape architectural work analysis. Instead, we are accounting for the projects' evolutive nature that includes the present moment, that of the designers' site observation, as a transient state 'as found' to be altered in a rather open-ended process which aims at another state of which not all instances are predefined at the start. Our analysis is limited by being carried out after, and not parallel to, the proper design process, of which we do not possess in-depth knowledge such as full insights of the overall brief or direct information about the designers' considerations and working methods. The intention in setting up the parameters was to transcend the inherited site understandings, which we initially described and, so to speak, avoid subscribing to a particular edition. Distinguishing between materials and structures has turned out to be very productive, as it reveals differences in the designers' working methods. The same can be stated for the distinction between practices and processes, as this highlights human activity and nature respectively as dynamic systems. Looking into atmospheres helped us disclose the corporeal and hence specific site-bound aspects that previous filters could not trace. Despite its importance on a meta-perspective level, employing memory as an immaterial parameter has been less successful. Tracing it is hard due to its multifaceted character; any resemblance between before and after can be explained with memory. Before removing this parameter from our analytical framework we want to apply it in a forthcoming step of analysis, including interviews with designers from which we expect to discern the matters the designers attribute to memory—and which we may not be able to intersect through the other parameters.

Site specificity as double reflex

Although Kwon probably had a more abstract idea in mind when she formulated her request for a partly fluid and nomadic, partly static and

place-bound notion of site specificity, we find it interesting to observe how our cases illustrate her dialectics within their approaches to site specificity. In the light of Burns and Kahn's distinction between the areas of control, effect and influence we have revealed the trans-scalar nature of these approaches—which corresponds to Kwon's dialectics. Interestingly enough, this oscillation or fluidity has been raised by our flux parameter, which not only enabled us to detect the designers' understanding of fluid qualities within the site itself but also the designers' recognition of the design project proper being fluid and possessing performative qualities. In our two cases, the flux study reveals links to dynamic place-bound properties (water, people, uses) on the one hand and on the other exposes the distinction between the flux qualities of the design project as an evolving system (Nantes) or as a dynamic machinic system (Marseille).

Site-specificity 'as found' and as a work mode

Our two cases almost exaggeratedly illustrate the two poles of site specificity. In the Marseille case we identify a structure-driven approach to site specificity in which the reading of repressed, place-bound site components through diagrams is predominant and informs the editing of the site. The design project is communicated through a static representation of an imaginary moment of the site after transformation. The Nantes case shows a phenomenon-driven approach to site specificity in which the reading of transient site components gathered on site is predominant and informs the editing of the site. The project is communicated as an ongoing open-ended sequence of transformative action, rejecting by its fluid nature any kind of end scenario.

In this sense the two cases are almost prototypes for two working methods, namely design versus transformation (referring to the article's transformation chapter). Pointing out structures as crucial for the development of the Marseille project, the designers need to rely on diagrams, which at the same time constitute their design tools. Conversely, the reading in the Nantes project depends heavily on on-site observations, which in the editing process can either be recorded in diagrams and then translated back onto the site, or carried out in situ without any mediation. The 'plan guide' is more of a mirror than a classic design tool, which means that this design project is not only based on a working method capable of steering the transformation process via a multitude of immediate steps but also presents itself as a method rather than as a visually described goal.

Narratives—synthesising the reading and editing

Our analysis not only brings out the differences between the two cases but also a commonality: the relation between the designers' reading and editing that dissolves the classical sequence between survey and project and synthesises both into a main comprehensive narrative—a plot, a concept—combining different aspects of site specificity: the repaired metropolitan metabolism in Marseille, the city as an immediate evolution in Nantes. This narrative is the foundational, stable element that steers the long-term transformation process, addresses smaller and larger scales, and involves multiple agents and actors. The existence of the narrative proves that site specificity is not construed from unrelated single parameters but from cleverly combining, relating, networking, hierarchising and

performing them as if they constituted the keyboard from which a melody arises through elaborate playing. The narrative—when constructed—is thus the guiding tool to which all other aspects (of site specificity) and procedures (of transformation) converge, and in our projects we can observe design concepts as an alternative to the conventional commercial concepts of many a harbour development project.

Narratives – negotiating the findings and the founding

We also note that the guiding narrative is meant to legitimise the design concept of our cases. Legitimation is generally drawn from common societal horizons of understanding and value systems, detectable in current, more-or-less local discourses. Ecological soundness and sustainability might be such a discourse addressed by the designers in the Marseille project, while the economy of resources and recycling sets the discursive frame of the Nantes project. In this context, the narrative contains the reasons for some of the main decisions taken in the projects, strictly referring to those discourses. The importance of developing arguments is currently increasing because the setting of the brief has become an integral part of many a transformation project. First of all, it has to tackle the question: For what purpose and in which way can a left-over site be used? (Braae 2007: 22; Sieverts 2008) The logic of the site reading seems to be linked to the site editing through a negotiation process. Various site-specific aspects can be integrated into the formulation of the site's future if they fit into and contribute to an encompassing narrative. This negotiation process comes to an end when sufficient correspondence between the findings and the founding is reached, namely when a strong narrative is formulated. It can be fed by the more general ambitions of large-scale harbour transformation, as in our analysis of connecting and appropriating, that parallel the conditional relationship set by the narrative on the level of the design project.

Large-scale harbour transformation projects are complex matters in many respects, inviting us to further explore the topical thematic and disciplinary issues that we have only slightly touched in this paper. Departing from an understanding of site as a dynamic relational construct and introducing a double-bind definition of site specificity, we have focused here on elaborating a heuristic model for detecting site specificity in European large-scale harbour transformation projects, sketching out their oscillation between a static, place-bound and a fluid, transient pole.

Notes

1 For example, the Le Havre-based Association Internationale Villes et Ports (AIVP), Venice-based Asociacion para la colaboracion entre Puertos y Ciudades (RETE).

2 For example, within the 10th Venice Architecture Biennial in 2006, which had a satellite show in Palermo called City-Port, or in Topos 48/2004, entitled *Coastlines and Harbours*.

3 An example for such tools delivered by the respective disciplines, mostly on national levels: In Denmark, architectural values in built-up areas are measured along two scales, Survey of Architectural Values in the Environment (SAVE), and Cultural History in Regional Planning (KIP).

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Ellen Braae, born 1965 in Denmark, studied architecture and landscape architecture at the Aarhus School of Architecture, which is also where she obtained her PhD with a thesis on the transformation of ruinous industrial landscapes (2003) combining landscape architecture and urbanism. Since 2009 she has been professor for Landscape Architecture at Forest and Landscape, the University of Copenhagen, where she is also head of studies for BSc and MSc landscape architecture education (only MSc since 2011). She is a member of the National Research Council for Culture and Communication and The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. She was previously an associate professor of Urban Design at Aalborg University (2003–6) and of Landscape Architecture at the Aarhus School of Architecture (2006–9), being responsible for the launch of a new landscape architecture education programme. Recent publications related to the subject of the article are *Fortiden for tiden. Genbrugskultur og kulturgensbrug idag* (2006) with art historian M. F. Hansen, *Aarhus Havn* (Aarhus Harbour, 2009) with painter S. Elgaard and, as guest editor with S. Riesto, the new international research journal *NORDIC Journal of Architecture* with the theme 'As Found'.

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